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SUBJECT: FOSG PARIS MEETING MAY 2008

Classified By: A/POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR ANDREW YOUNG FOR REASONS  
1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary: During a May 8 meeting in Paris, the Western Friends of the Secretary General on Georgia (FOSG), consisting of the U.S., UK, France, and Germany, enthusiastically endorsed EUR DAS Matt Bryza's proposal for reviving the Abkhazia peace process. Bryza laid out a new three-pronged approach to advance the settlement process through direct Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations to elaborate President Saakashvili's peace initiatives; firm political pressure on Russia to prevent further infringement on Georgia's sovereignty; and the creation of a new forum to provide advice and raise money for the implementation of economic, social, and information links between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia. All of the Western Friends enthusiastically supported Bryza's proposal. However, they opposed Georgia's UN General Assembly resolution on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). End summary.

12. (U) Participants: U.S. - EUR DAS Matthew Bryza; UK - MFA South Caucasus Director Sir Brian Fall; France -- MFA Deputy Political Director Veronique Bujon-Barre; Germany -- MFA South Caucasus Director Hans-Dieter Lucas. Notetaker: EUR/CARC Conflicts Advisor Mike Carpenter.

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Russia's Actions in Abkhazia  
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13. (C) The Western members of the FOSG -- Germany, France and the UK -- generally agreed that recent Russian actions in Abkhazia, including its March 6 decision to withdraw from CIS economic and military sanctions, the April 16 Kremlin instructions to establish closer ties with Georgia's separatist regions, the April 20 downing of a Georgian UAV, and the April 29 unilateral decision to augment Russian peacekeeping forces with airborne troops, were not in keeping with Russia's role as a "facilitator" of the peace process. Germany and France did not believe these steps were part of a "master plan" to gain further control of Abkhazia, but were simply an "unfortunate chain reaction" brought about in part by Georgia's heightened state of military readiness. Bryza countered that Georgia's heightened military readiness was a direct response to Russian actions. Germany and France agreed that Georgia's response, while restrained in substance, was nevertheless "alarmist in tone." For that reason, they believed that the Western Friends should counsel restraint on both Russia and Georgia. UK representative Sir Brian Fall agreed, but lamented the number of times the Friends had called for Georgian restraint following a Russian provocation.

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UAVs and the Moscow Agreement  
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14. (C) French MFA Deputy Political Director Veronique Bujon-Barre said the French MFA's Legal Office had reviewed the Moscow Agreement and concluded that Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) flights over the zone of conflict were not a violation. Germany and the UK argued that legal arguments could be made both ways and that the Moscow Agreement was too ambiguous to make a definitive case one way or the other. DAS Bryza noted that since UAVs were not specifically mentioned in the agreement and were not even in widespread use at the time, it did not make sense to interpret the agreement as prohibiting them, particularly at a time when Russian withdrawal from CIS military sanctions made military transparency a paramount and legitimate concern. Bryza agreed that the agreement was vague and argued that a more important point was that Russia had violated Georgia's sovereignty and the UN Charter by shooting down a Georgian drone within Georgian airspace, and that the discussion of the applicability of the Moscow Agreement to UAVs was a distraction from this far more fundamental breach of international law.

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A New Plan for Reviving the Peace Process  
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15. (C) DAS Bryza presented the Western Friends with a three-point plan to: (1) encourage Georgia to elaborate its proposal of autonomy for Abkhazia (including constitutional guarantees); (2) put pressure on Russia to prevent further infringement of Georgia's sovereignty; and (3) create a new forum to oversee the implementation of measures to create economic, social, and information links between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia, which would evolve into a forum for direct Georgian-Abkhaz talks. Bryza explained that an expanded "Forum for Peace Implementation" would complement the FOSG by focusing on financial and diplomatic support for the peace plan, and could include both FOSG members and the UN, EU, OSCE, Turkey, Ukraine, and perhaps also Bulgaria and Romania. The Western Friends all enthusiastically embraced Bryza's proposal. In response to Bryza's suggestion, German FOSG Coordinator Hans-Dieter Lucas agreed the German MFA could host a conference in Berlin on economic confidence-building measures as called for in a 2005 UN Security Council Resolution, which could give life to the new forum Bryza had suggested.

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IDP Resolution  
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16. (C) Germany, France, and the UK all opposed Georgia's UN General Assembly resolution on IDPs on the grounds that it detracted from the UN Security Council as the proper forum for discussion of Abkhazia, was not conducive to building confidence with the Abkhaz, and would demonstrate division among the international community. DAS Bryza told the group the U.S. would likely support the resolution, as it gave breathing room for those in the GOG who wanted to pursue the line of negotiations. Bryza also noted that Georgian UN Permanent Representative Irakli Alasania had previewed the resolution with Abkhaz de facto foreign minister Shamba, and the latter had not objected to the GOG's tabling of the resolution. The UK indicated it might be willing to consider supporting the resolution if some amendments were made to the text concerning the "unacceptability of demographic change" in Abkhazia. (Note: Following the FOSG meeting in Paris and a subsequent exchange between EUR/CARC Conflicts Advisor and Georgian UN Ambassador Irakli Alasania, the operative paragraph on the unacceptability of demographic change was removed and a new preambular paragraph was added. The old operative paragraph read: "Reaffirms the unacceptability of the demographic changes resulting from the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, and deplores any attempt to alter

pre-conflict demographic composition in Abkhazia, Georgia." The new preambular paragraph reads: "Deeply concerned by the demographic changes resulting from the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, and regretting any attempt to alter pre-conflict demographic composition in Abkhazia, Georgia." Despite these changes to the text, which directly addressed the UK's concerns, the UK, France, and Germany abstained. End Note.)

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UN investigation into the April 20 incident  
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¶17. (C) The Friends all agreed that the UN should complete its investigation of the April 20 shoot-down of a Georgian UAV to prove its credibility. If the UN failed to conduct a credible investigation that drew definitive conclusions, the EU would be in a position to launch its own Instant Assessment Mechanism to review the evidence. All four members of the Western Friends agreed the evidence overwhelmingly pointed to the likelihood that a Russian fighter shot down the Georgian drone.

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Comment  
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¶18. (C) The Western Friends, support for DAS Bryza's proposal to revive the peace process allows the USG to move forward with the plan to create a complementary format to the Friends process, but without allowing any one country to veto its functioning. A new "Forum for Peace Implementation" will create support -- financially and politically -- for Georgian efforts to develop closer economic, cultural, and information links with Abkhazia. It could also support direct Abkhaz-Georgian negotiations, which are an essential precondition for any meaningful progress in the talks.

¶19. (U) This cable was drafted by EUR/CARC and cleared by EUR DAS Matt Bryza.  
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